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ABSTRACT

Arguing that American schools are not meeting their goals in developing concerned, active citizens who seek to continue to read and learn after their formal schooling has ended, this paper supports this argument by citing information concerning adults' use of books and mass media. The first section of the paper assesses current adult reading and media behavior in terms of the stated goals of education, while the second section examines two reasons why education has not made a greater impact on postschooling reading and media behavior: (1) the pervasiveness of the nonschool curriculum and (2) habits developed by the school curriculum. The third section suggests steps that reading educators must take if educational goals of lifelong learning and reading are to be met, and identifies a series of "macropropaganda" techniques (strategies that influence the larger news or media picture) used by the media that educators must teach their students to recognize and analyze. (FL)

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Reading in the Disciplines:

Post Schooling Concerns

by

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One goal of education is preparation of life. Reading educators concerned with reading in the disciplines are therefore appropriately concerned with their student's future reading/learning behaviors. If reading instruction in the disciplines has had an impact upon behavior this should be partially reflected in the adults' use of related books and mass media. It has been argued (Strang, 1956) that educators are not, in fact, helping their students meet stated educational goals. That arguement will be restated here in a different form in order to suggest what educators in the disciplines must do to promote stated goals.

This arguement will be pursued by 1) assessing current adult reading/media behavior in terms of the goals of education; 2) relating adults reading/media behavior to their larger educational/socializing context; and 3) emphasizing steps reading educators must take if stated educational goals are to be met within their present and lifelong curriculum.

Information is conveyed to adults through books, newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Since one media stimulates activity and influences activity in the other media-reading in the disciplines will be considered broadly here. That is, given that the goal of teaching reading in the disciplines is to encourage exposure to learning in the disciplines--all media will be considered. Therefore, the term reading/media will here be used to refer to books, magazines, newspaper, radio and television.

Reading Behavior of Adults

If the reading/media behavior of adults reflect the goals of education--what would those goals appear to be? Consider the status of adult reading/media habits. The research methodology in this area has provided largely survey or descriptive data. This data has been criticized for a variety

of reasons, but largely because checklists or reading inventories used in this line of research do not have documented reliability or validity (Purves and Beach, 1972). However, certain patterns of behavior are consistently reported. It appears that most adult reading is functional reading (Sharon, 1973-4); most adults read or at least scan a newspaper daily and over a third of adults spend some time with books or magazines (Asheim, 1956).

Actually, reading of books tends to be a rather exclusive activity-20% of all readers account for 70% of all books read (Purves and Beach, 1972). Waples in 1912, pointed out that "heavy readers are those with little else to do" (p. 184), unfortunately, this worrisome fact still appears to be valid. Reading/learning in the disciplines, beyond the individuals' job is limited. The average adult gets most of his/her news and information from television (Robinson and Jeffers, 1981) and believes the news from this source more than other sources (Larkin, et al, 1977). However, television is used largely to pass the time, for companionship, entertainment and to a lesser extent for information (Rubin, 1981). Also, adults who get most of their information from television tend to be more passive or non-involved politically. Newspapers are also used more for entertainment, sensational news, and pictorial material than for information. Adults prefer to read about themselves and their family versus their community and world. (Asheim, 1972; Larkin, et al, 1977).

There does seem to be a growing interest in reading in some disciplines. There is, for example, more interest in science news (Nunn, 1979) and in nonfiction books (Purves and Beach, 1972). This is consistent with the above behaviors since interest in science/nonfiction articles tend to be

in areas as better health, diet or areas related to self as a survey of the nonfiction 'best seller' list indicates.

The factor controlling adults use of media/books tends to be related to visibility and accessibility. The more space given to an item in the news, the more likely people are to read this; the more available materials, the more they are read.

If these behaviors reflected planned educational goals then the goals of education would be described as: 1) learning to use books and mass media for entertainment, 2) acceptance of television as the most valid source of information, 3) use of available sources of information 4) learning to focus upon self not the world, and 5) developing habits of passive political behavior. Reading in specific areas of any discipline would appear to be for the specialist.

Stated goals of the educational process are obviously different. Education of self was not intended to foster a preoccupation with self or entertainment of self. The importance or preparing students to read i.e. to learn in the disciplines is underscored when these true goals of education are considered. Goals of education generally include: learning to be a problem-solving person and accepting one's responsibility for oneself and one's role in society, learning "to weigh the worth of what we have done or dare to do... (Jennings, 1965) and developing habits of "activity of thought" and "the art of utilizing knowledge". (Whitehead, 1929).

To some extent there has been success in reaching these goals, and education--at least higher education--is associated with that success. For example, more educated adults read more and use media differently (i.e. not only for entertainment). Yet, for the greater numbers of our students post-schooling reading/learning in the disciplines, except in

job related areas, appears to be minimal.

Reading in the Disciplines: Lifelong Curriculum

There are, of course, many reasons why education has not made a greater impact of post-schooling reading/media behavior. Two reasons will be considered here 1) the pervasiveness of the non-school curriculum and 2) habits developed by the school curriculum.

There is a curriculum we all face throughout our life--this curriculum runs concurrently with formal schooling and becomes the sole and pervasive curriculum for most adults for more than two-thirds of their lives. This curriculum has well-articulated goals. If we consider these goals as stated and evaluate these also in terms of the goals these reflect for adults, an interesting picture emerges. The life-long curriculum for reading in the disciplines is, of course, that generated by mass media i.e. television, radio and newspapers. The goals of the mass media are 1) to act as "leaders of the masses," by following Walter Lippmans' dictate for developing a "picture of reality on which men can act;" 2) to be the social conscious of the community (Lehnert, 1980); 3) to act as a socializing agency (Courtright and Baran, 1980), to be opinion molders and "to inform, interpret, guide and entertain" (Bond, 1961). If these are the goals of the media then it follows that the media's goal for adults might be interpreted as developing adults who will 1) follow, 2) respond to messages involving social criticism, 3) become homogenized, i.e. be responsive to reports on changing social/cultural moves, 4) seek guidance and their opinion from the press, an especially 5) seek to be entertained.

There are similiarities between the goals of education and the media: both purportedly strive for well-informed and civically active adults.

Educators, however, seek to develop people who will structure and evaluate information and make well-informed decisions. The media apparently strives to structure information and personalize news to promote specific action.

These differences in goals need to be evaluated to determine if educators are inevitably promoting the goals of the mass media--that is developing uncritical consumers of mass media. If the two curriculum developers are evaluated in light of current adult reading/media habits--the media is meeting its curriculum goals-educators are not!

Preparation for the Lifelong Curriculum

If reading/media behavior related to learning the disciplines is to reflect the goals of education then educators must deal with the context in which this learning will take place. That is, educators then must prepare students for dealing with mass media or specifically with reading/learning in the discipline from mass media sources.

It may be unfair to criticize the mass market for failing to promote either some of their own highly state goals or the goals of education. It might be argued that if given interests and habits had been developed in the schooling process, the mass media would be able to profitably promote goals stated by educators.

Media experts and educators agree that the continued growth of information, the impact of new technology on an individual's lifestyle, and the importance given public opinion -- all require a well-informed, involved, information seeking, decision making public. Most of the information coming to the public in the post-schooling context will come from mass media, and media experts recognize limitations in their presentation of this information. Since these limitations result in the influencing

of public opinion or in the potential biased presentation of information--they are essentially propaganda techniques. Those propaganda techniques which serve to subvert however unintentionally, the goals of education need to be recognized by educators. If educators can, in turn, enable their students to deal with these propaganda techniques, they might be more successful in promoting more effective post-schooling reading/learning in the disciplines.

Students are currently instructed to identify 'propaganda techniques' such as use of the plain folks approach and card stacking (Singer and Donlan, 1980). However, these might be termed 'micropropaganda techniques' because they exist "within" a given article or source. To become a critical, active, or self-initiating decision maker students must recognize 'macro-propaganda techniques' or strategies which influence the larger news or media picture.

The goal here in emphasizing macropropaganda techniques is not to develop more animosity toward books/media or to create more cynical consumers, for this might only result in more passive withdrawal from information sources. The goal in promoting recognition of these techniques should be to help students recognize and deal with practical constraints upon themselves and the media. This caution is important for recognition of micropropaganda techniques has apparently been effective. That is, readers are sensitive to these micropropaganda techniques such as "twists of expressions" (Berry, 1976, p. 119) and one wonders if recognition of these techniques has lead to the decline in newspaper readership or to the fact that less than 30% of the population state that they accept at face value, statements made in the news (O'Keefe, 1981).

It should be pointed out that media constraints and resultant macro-propaganda techniques are closely intertwined with what the media perceives as time and information processing constraints of individuals. The six macropropagenda techniques presented here are all criticisms raised by media people: They have criticized presentation of information in terms of the: 1) focus upon entertaining or "gratifying" readers/viewers; 2) simplification of information; 3) personalization of information; 4) influence or habits of mind; 5) the striving for visually capturing events; and 6) the fact that media is controlled by a few, often vested, interests. The six macropropagenda techniques parelling these criticisms are labelled and discussed below.

1. Let me entertain you

Students must recognize that their own desire to be entertained influences what type of and how much news they are presented. Entertainment is fast becoming a major media goal. Students can evaluate this entertainment focus by asking, "what are these people saying about me to present me with this?" If they were eighteen and given a doll or toy for their birthday they would be insulted by the 'giver'--students must also realize when their intelligence can be insulted by the news reporting. It might help if students evaluated their own use of media in relation to (desired) self-concept as a person and their (desired concept of adult peers.

2. Let me make it easy for you

Media and book coverage of any topic of information cannot be criticized for clarifying information--but when clarification results in extreme exclusion or distortion of information, sutdents must be concerned. Reese and Miller (1981) suggest that the wealth of available information is so confusing that structuring this information becomes necessary to

"mold well-structured...well-stocked attitudes."

It is often suggested that today information is so complex that much cannot be comprehended by the general educated public. It is true that today even experts do not even fully understand each other. But this does not mean we must be directed by a very small carde of individuals but that different information must be sought (consequences, related values). Students need to be accustomed to seeking and weighing multiple sources of information and recognize the fact that sometimes even the experts do not know all the facts. The experts and their interpreters must be respected for admitting when information is not fully known or available and allow adults to understand when a 'leap of faith' is being requested. Students must also learn to a) require that multiple viewpoints be presented by experts and b) that these views and related information be evaluated by experts.

The classroom use of a single textbook, single source of information may in fact discourage a life long habit of seeking varying viewpoints and the constant search for the right answer may inhibit the ability to deal with uncertainty.

3. <u>You, you, you'</u>

Information is personalized in the media to promote interest. Media sources seek to meet identified interests and to selectively relay information relating to these interests. Womack (1981) has shown that the selective attention of various newspapers to news in the world results in readers acquiring quite different views of the world. It might also be pointed out that interest can be created if an event can be peronalized (as hostages in Iran). There is a Catch 22 quality to this phenomena for the media can only capture readership/views in terms of their present

interests/ it is unlikely that news relating to broader interests will be presented, and thus unlikely that broader interests will be developed. Educators need to develop in students the habit of requiring information on what the event means to the larger units involved as well as to individuals. If an individuals world view is to grow and not to be totally controlled by media, students need to automatically ask for related economic, social, and political information.

4. "Brevity is the 'hole' of the mind"

Space/time of limitations of media result in highlighting and abbreviating reporting of news events. Novak (1975) points out that the nature of media is likely to impact on habits of the mind. The rapid science switching of television, he points out, does not promote evaluation or structuring of information. The newspaper has in effect "imitated" the cryptic television reporting style by highlighting news-briefs. Perhaps these news blurbs are satisying to students who are accustomed to passively dealing with or 'learning' cryptic, isolated bits of information. If students' 'habits of mind' required in-depth information, these cryptic presentations would be less satisfying. Students should at least learn to demand a news overview and a rationale for the focus of a news story and to question the cryptic, event-focused nature of news reports.

5. "Seeing is believing"

What is seen on television is believed more. This may not be because television news is actually more accurate. As noted earlier, students have been taught to criticize the misuse of the 'word' - they are less critical of the misuse of the picture. Students need to recognize how viewpoints or facts can be manipulated by controlling the angle or frame of a pic-

ture.

6. "It is a business world"

The world of science, news, discovery becomes limited when vested interests are involved in a news event. Carter and Adler (1975) point out that 90% of the most widely used source of information (television) is controlled by three networks. The number of newspapers in the country and publishing houses are also decreasing and increasingly coming into the hands of fewer and fewer sources. Book publishers, media sources could not continue if they did not make a profit. Students must consider to what extent this can result in a public disservice. For example, Berry (1976) pointed out that even when a television show had a large audience, it was dropped because the viewers were non-buyers i.e. middle-aged or over (p. 17). Media sources may have "slant" information in recognition of a debt to a sources of support. There are institutes and grant funding institutions dedicated to bringing to the public to their own views by news releases. This can expand the range of information presented when the source and orientation are identified. Sutdents simply have to inquire about the political and financial interests/ goals of those who control their information source. Moreover, students can learn to identify slanting of the news beter, if the controlling interests are clear.

Summary

The schools are not meeting their goals in developing concerned,active citizens who seek to continue to read/learn within the disciplines. The fault for this may be shared by the schools curriculum and the wider life-long curriculum provided by the mass media. Critical evaluation of the mass media might result in positive use of and changes in both the school and lifelong curriculum.

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